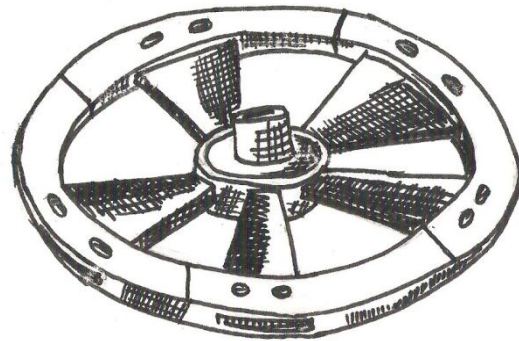


Between the Axle and the Rim

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In modern times, the world has experienced what has been melancholically termed “the crisis of faith”. In his book, *The Recovery of Faith* (1956),¹ former President of India S. Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), lists seven reasons behind this faith-crisis: scientific discoveries that disprove popular religious views, studies in comparative religions that discourage any claim to uniqueness by a particular religion, advancement of technology and depersonalization of the human, popularity of logical empiricism and resultant depreciation of philosophy and metaphysics, disappointment with religion that fails in true life despite the many external rituals, religious schisms that hamper world-unity, and growth of irreligiosity. Sadly, in the post-modern era, as the grip of faith loosened, it kicked back against any faith in reason as well. Truth was relativized and pluralized as the absolutes vanished into thin air. The confusion of plurality and the engagement with impersonal materialism has birthed a religious lukewarmness that sends the believer into fits of faith-amnesia, during which time the real world stands by to make room for the faithless moment. Faith lingers somewhere in the mind as a set of propositions and dictums, while the



person is detached. Doubt hovers horrifically to disengage the soul from true spirituality. The passion of faith is lost to the passion of the flesh – to the luster, savor, odor, and touch of the world-at-hand, as uncertainty plays its sinister role. This spiritual schizophrenia of faith is blatant where the process of secularization is vibrant and religion is privatized, without any logical bridge between the personal and the public. Faith having been dethroned from the public sphere, both truth and values are now gone berserk. The only hope lies in the reconsolidating of the heart with faith that is operative through love (Gal.5:6).

Connecting the Core to the Circumference

In his *The Vocation of Man*, German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) recognized that there can never be an ending to the spate of skepticism unless faith comes to rescue. Neither reason nor experience (as portrayed by the rationalists and the empiricists) could be the ground of truth; faith in God provides the certainty for anything else. In Book III, he wrote:

I understand thee now, sublime Spirit! I have found the organ by which to apprehend this reality and, with this, probably all other reality. Knowledge is not this organ: no knowledge can be its own foundation, its own proof; every knowledge pre-supposes another higher

¹ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Recovery of Faith* (Middlesex: Clements, Newling & Co. Ltd., 1956)

knowledge on which it is founded, and to this ascent there is no end. It is FAITH, that voluntary acquiescence in the view which is naturally presented to us, because only through this view can we fulfil our vocation; this it is, which first lends a sanction to knowledge, and raises to certainty and conviction that which without it might be mere delusion. It is not knowledge, but a resolution of the will to admit the validity of knowledge.²

To Fichte, the criterion of truth was faith; anything opposed to it is speculative and false. In fact, even false knowledge can't presume without the principles of faith at its premises, from which, though, it derives false conclusions. Ultimately, he grounded truth and conviction on morality, calling conscience the touchstone and root of all truth and conviction.³ To him faith was congenital and *a priori*. Every man is born with faith.⁴ No wonder that when the foundation of faith is shaken, both moral integrity and epistemic certainty crash down. The Scripture rightly cautioned: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Prov.4:23, NIV).

From the very beginning of its convicting manifestation to the heart through the Spirit, the Word of faith holds a gripping and commanding effect – to obey or disobey remains the question.

creedal statements as "I believe" *Credo*, according to him,

...is a compound from *cor*, *cordial*, "heart" (as in English "cordial," "accord," "concord," and the like; compare also, from the closely parallel Greek cognate *kardia*, the English derivatives "cardiac," "electrocardiogram," etc.), plus *do*, "put, place, set," also "give." The first meaning of the compound in classical Latin had

been and its primary meaning continued to be "to entrust, to commit, to trust something to someone," and of money, "to lend." ... A secondary meaning in secular usage was "to trust in," "to rely upon," "to place confidence in." ...

There would seem little question but that as a crucial term used at a crucial moment in a crucial liturgical act of personal engagement – namely Christian baptism – *credo* came close to its root meaning of "I set my heart on," "I give my heart to" ("I hereby give my heart to Christ"; "I herein give my heart to God the Father" ...); or more generally: "I hereby commit myself ("to..."), "I pledge allegiance."⁶

In the original sense of usage, "faith" and "belief" meant "to set one's heart on".⁵ In *Faith and Belief* (1979), Wilfred Cantwell Smith exposed the classic understanding of the Latin term *credo*. Usually translated in Christian

According to the Bible, faith is the acknowledgement and committed surrender of heart to the proclamation of the Word of faith (Rom.10:8-10). From the very beginning of its convicting manifestation to the heart through the Spirit, the Word of faith holds a gripping and commanding effect – to obey or disobey remains the question. Credibility is convincingly woven into faith. The Word claims the central position of one's life, the very core of being. Take for instance Jude 1:3 where Christians are called to contend for "the

² Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of Man* (Trs. William Smith, Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1931), pp.99-100

³ *Ibid*, p.101

⁴ "We are all born in faith; he who is blind, follows blindly the secret and irresistible impulse; he who sees, follows by sight, and believes because he resolves to believe." *Ibid*, p.102

⁵ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981), pp.11,12

⁶ Smith, *Faith and Belief* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), p.76. As cited by Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, p.12

faith which was once delivered unto the saints"; this faith is nothing but the revelation of the Gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ. Here, faith is both personal and propositional. Faith in God and faith in His Word are one and at the same time. There can be no separation of God from His Word. It is "faith" because of the nature of the divine revelation, which is supernatural truth, not attainable or graspable by either human reason or human experience.⁷ The certitude of faith is the gift of grace.⁸ The objective revelation is a given that becomes personal when subjectively absorbed through faith.⁹ The revelation is never like the truths of nature that are amoral (i.e., morally neutral); the revealed Word is moral in nature. It is morally binding on moral creatures. The revelation of the Word obliges faith. For, while the Word spoken to amoral creation is physically binding; the Word spoken to moral creatures is morally binding, and commanding obedience to faith. Now, the central personality of this revelation is Christ; therefore, rejection of faith is rejection of Christ.¹⁰ Also, since the revelation of faith is clear and convincing to the intellect, the rejection of faith is inexcusable. Faith is substance; it is never a vague idea in which some confidence is placed, as some modern dictionaries define "belief" to be. It is solid

and divinely grounded truth that demands not a blind risk-involved, wager kind of response; but, absolute trust and surrender. In other words, faith is knowledge. It is not the most-probable-simple-hypothesis that does not and cannot command obedience. It has to be certain in order to be divine; or else, one has not yet heard Truth and, therefore, is not obligated by it. When the Word is preached as it is, it allows no excuse; it needs no evidence, for it itself is the evidence; to deny it would be self-defeating.¹¹

The opposite of faith, in the Bible, is willful imagination, which is a fanciful construct of the sinful human heart as, for example, in Genesis 8:21, "the imagination [Hb. *yetser*] of man's heart is evil from his youth," and in Luke 1:51, "He hath scattered the proud in the imagination [Gk. *dianoia*] of their heart." Self-presumptuous and doubtful imagination [Gk. *dialogismos* (Rom.1:21), *logismos* (2Cor.10:5)] is idolatrous and anti-divine. It can never be the substitute for genuine faith because it is founded on lie and delusion. Therefore, anti-faith leads to an inauthentic and morally reprobate lifestyle. Anti-faith results in epistemic confusion and ethical corruption.

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God...but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened... Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie....¹²

In other words, unless true spirituality in the form of personal-propositional-practical faith holds central position in the core of the heart, the whole lifestyle is delusion and destruction lived out.

⁷ Cp. "faith...is the gift of God" (Eph.2:7); "the fruit of the Spirit is...faith" (Gal.5:22); "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God... because they are spiritually discerned" (1Cor.2:14).

⁸ Cp. "...no man can say that Jesus is the Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1Cor.12:3).

⁹ Cp. "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard *it*" (Heb.4:2).

¹⁰ This was true of also faith in the Old Testament. The rejection of faith was rejection of Christ. Cp. "For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" and "...nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents" (1Cor.10:4,9).

¹¹ "Faith is...the evidence of things not seen" (Heb.11:1).

¹² Romans 1:21-25

Certainty and Significance

Faith acts as the hypostatic ground of three epistemic sources: reason, moral principle (practical/ normative reason), and revelation. Regarding the first, faith rests at the base of all epistemic convictions. If it is true, as Aristotle observed, that all men by nature desire to know, then it is also true that all men by nature desire to believe; for, to know is to believe. Faith is the ultimate foundation of all knowledge and the condition of all knowability. Faith is not based on reason; for to assume it so, as Blaise Pascal had rightly observed, would beg the question, as one would need to believe in reason in the first place.

Regarding the second, there is in man something called moral belief or conviction; this, regardless of any people or culture. It is not possible to ultimately ground morality on either reason or experience, though attempts have been made towards that. Teleological ethics doesn't involve a moral obligation – the end result “good” doesn't necessarily command the ought of any man. In fact, though one may circumferentially live a moral life for teleological reasons, that moral life is devoid of a real moral center. Morality is reduced to mere peripheral stage-show as Adeimantus in Plato's *The Republic* argues, “Since then, as philosophers prove, appearance tyrannizes over truth and is lord of happiness, to appearance I must devote myself.”¹³ Such morality is relative, situational, utilitarian, and hedonist. However, if morality were ultimately self-centered, the thought of circumferential morality would be blank and empty; for, without the obligating principle neither virtue nor vice exist, and no “moral” action is worth any praise. The only obligating principle, therefore, must lie within the inner chambers of the heart. The Bible is clear on the fact that moral conviction is ubiquitous

throughout the various people groups of the world, “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts” (Rom. 2:14-15). The external conduct of the gentiles is the index of the inner conscience.

Finally, there is that unquestionable appeal of divine revelation through the Spirit, which commands absolute obedience. Therefore, the Scripture adjoins: “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb.4:7). The proclamation of the Word commands obedience of faith; it leaves men no excuse for unbelief. The Word is convicting and convincing. However, as perceived by the individual, certainty of faith and significance of the same are two different things. This relates not just to the first-time hearer of the Word, but extends also to those who have already known the Word. There is always the possibility that its significance is lost in time, resulting in spiritual lukewarmness.

The Bible emphasizes the importance of both certainty and significance in faith – “Your word is very pure (tried and well refined); therefore Your servant loves it.”¹⁴ However, one would question if the servant was truly loving the Word which he knew was pure when he fell into sin with Bathsheba or cold-bloodedly got her husband, Uriah, killed. The act was not in ignorance. Some part of the cognitive faculty was blinded in the will's choice of what was more important. While the mind was certain of the truth of God, the heart had gone after acts contrary to it. This is not impossible. What may be certain to the mind may hold no significance for the heart that is hardened by will-to-self. Therefore, Paul makes it clear that the strength of godliness is rootedness in and comprehension of Christ's love through a personal relationship with the Lord (Eph.3:17-19). The

¹³ Plato, *The Republic and Other Works* (Trs. B. Jowett, New York: Anchor Books, 1989), p. 49

¹⁴ Psalm 119:140 (Amplified Bible)

experience of divine fullness and totality is never merely cerebral nor ceremonial; it is personal and *agapeistic* (rooted in love) – it is cardiac. The mind can be full of faith-propositions and the soul full of faith-rituals, while the heart suffers a faithless apathy against the Lord; all this, despite the self being aware of this all.

In Lecture 55 of his *Systematic Theology*, Charles Finney wrote:

... intellectual light is the condition, both of the heart's faith and unbelief. By the assertion, that intellectual light is a condition of unbelief is intended, not that the intellect should at all times admit the truth in theory; but that the evidence must be such, that by virtue of its own laws, the mind or intellect could justly admit the truth rejected by the heart. It is a very common case, that the unbeliever denies in words and endeavours to refute in theory, that which he nevertheless assumes as true, in all his practical judgments.

That is where Nathan caught David, when he reacted to his story of a rich man taking away his only sheep (2 Sam.12:1-9). David immediately fell under conviction. Obviously, the moral light, as well as the light of God's Word, are undeniable. Yet, they look cold and indifferent to a heart frozen to numbness by the anguish of sin and frustration of unbelief. The strength of faith is significance. One only holds on to that which continues to hold significance for him/her. Passion is relative to significance and significance is determined by the object that the will inclines itself towards.¹⁵ When the soul inclines itself towards the tangible and less faith-demanding object or situation, the original faith-vision is distorted for a while.¹⁶ If a realization occurs later on,

¹⁵ See Joshua 24:23; Psalm 119:36

¹⁶ Cp. "Operative beliefs can be dislodged by emotional experiences.... They can hemorrhage and simply bleed away when love is disappointed, expectations numbed, or one becomes crippled,

the soul is torn between the two in remorse; if persisted despite of it, the departure is sharpened towards destruction. May be, Judas' decision to betray Jesus and his later suicide were all an arrangement of his confused heart that couldn't figure out how to reconcile his frustration for money with the revelation of the long-awaited Messiah. Somewhere, the compromise was broached and his life disarrayed. No wonder that Lucifer had fallen from that same place of certainty in the presence of God. His desire for self-significance distorted his world against the reality of God. He was without excuse. Well said Jesus, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt.6:24). The lifeline that connects the axle to the rim is the affective reliance that one has in the person of Christ. The rest follows this. One may perhaps lose sight of a few connected beliefs; but, as long as the lifeline remains strong, the connection is intact – the disturbance is sooner resolved. Too much focus away from the chief object of faith to the peripheral ones can bring confusion to meaning and significance.¹⁷ The chief focus of the vision should be secure, first of all, though the rest abide in the peripheral. Theology in all its details is secondary; the axle must anchor in Christ.

unjustly imprisoned or the victim of malice. In brief convicts are maintained by feeling; when the feeling bleeds away, the convict dies; so a person who loses religious faith loses a whole family of interpretative and evaluative beliefs along with it." James F. Ross, "Rational Reliance", <http://www.sas.upenn.edu>

¹⁷ Cp. Thomas Kempis, *Imitation of Christ* (Trs. A. Croft & H. Bolton, digitized by Harry Plantinga, 1994), p.6 "What good does it do to speak learnedly about the Trinity if, lacking humility, you displease the Trinity?... I would rather feel contrition than know how to define it. For what would it profit us to know the whole Bible by heart and the principles of all the philosophers if we live without grace and the love of God?"

Credence and Confession

Confession of faith is as important as the credence to faith; “for with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom.10:10). Denial of faith is the active rejection of the Word to have any part in one’s life, for whatever reason. Psychiatrists agree that denial is a kind of defense mechanism that rejects facts that bring discomfort or hindrance to personally preferred objectives in life.¹⁸ This means that there is more than the classical epistemic sources (*viz.* reason, experience, revelation) to knowledge and faith. The new field of epistemics has shown that there are other social and psychological mechanisms involved in the producing of the noetic moment.¹⁹ In his essay “Rational Reliance”,²⁰ James F. Ross, Professor of Philosophy and Law at the University of Pennsylvania, argues that “willing reliance, motivated, even sometimes caused by feeling and desire aimed at various benefits, is an essential element in our knowing generally and in science, and particularly in our religious knowledge of things unseen.” The noetic mechanism is more complicated than mere plumping for either reason or experience. While one can look at doubt as somewhat justifiably involved in the rational cognitive process – skepticism may not be totally unhelpful – denial is an altogether different mechanism. It denies persuasive facts for personal reasons. From the psychological perspective, it is an avoidance mechanism; from the philosophical perspective, it is a utilitarian choice; from the Biblical perspective, it is sin.

The post-modern believer may not consider the denial of Peter to be so serious. The circumference is not as important as is the core. One may believe in the heart and may for justifiable reasons choose to remain an “anonymous Christian.”²¹ Religion is a private issue after all. However, sooner one notices a compromise broached in the absence of pure identity-distinction. The circumference must be integrally connected to the core as the rim is connected to the axle with spokes; or else, the wheel of life will neither rotate nor move forward without this intra-connection, this intra-consistency. This extends also to confession and denial in deeds. For, confession is not just a matter of words; confession is everything that pertains to the external life. Paul writes to Titus about so-called religious people of the day as those who “profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work” (Tit.1:16). This was what offended Gandhi during his contact with members of the Plymouth Brethren in South Africa. In answer to one’s argument that Jesus brings peace through redemption despite our continuing sins, he replied:

If this be the Christianity acknowledged by all Christians I cannot accept it. I do not seek redemption from the consequences of my sin. I seek to be redeemed from sin itself, or rather from the very thought of sin. Until I have attained that end, I shall be content to be restless.²²

He continues to write sadly of the Plymouth Brother who argued that we can never be

¹⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denial>

¹⁹ Alvin I. Goldman, “Epistemics: The Regulative Theory of Cognition,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 75, No. 10, (Oct., 1978), p.509

²⁰ <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~jross/Essays1.htm>

²¹ An important term in Karl Rahner’s inclusivism, the “anonymous Christian” is someone who is Christian at heart though not in confession – in fact, he may not even know Christ as Christians know Him. He is not a confessing Christian.

²² M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography* (Trs. Mahadev Desai, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1927), p.115

delivered from sins, though we have forgiveness: "He knowingly committed transgressions, and showed me that he was undisturbed by the thought of them."²³ On the last page of his *Autobiography*, he confesses about his own life:

...the world's praise fails to move me, indeed it very often stings me. To conquer the subtle passions seems to me to be harder far than the physical conquest of the world by the force of arms. Ever since my return to India I have had experiences of the dormant passions lying hidden within me. The knowledge of them has made me feel humiliated though not defeated. The experiences and experiments have sustained me and given me great joy. But I know that I have still before me a difficult path to traverse. I must reduce myself to zero. So long as a man does not of his own free will put himself last among his fellow creatures, there is no salvation for him. Ahimsa is the farthest limit of humility.²⁴

One general way to approach the amelioration of the soul is through restraint of the passions, as they rise. However, symptomatic treatment can never cure the root problem. Therefore, says Paul regarding circumferential attempts to define the core as such that "have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh" (Col.2:23). The core must define the meaningful relationship with the circumference. Or else, the potentiality of sin is heightened when engagement with the rush and busyness of the world is paused. The circumference becomes meaningless when

²³ *Ibid*, p.115. But, Gandhi confessed that he wasn't prejudiced against Christianity due to some secluded beliefs of the Plymouth Brethren. He had himself witnessed great Christian examples in his life. His difficulties lay elsewhere, with regard to the Bible and its accepted interpretation. Cf. pp.115-116

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.464

meaningful definitions and compulsions are absent from the core. Logotherapist Viktor E. Frankl observes:

Let us think, for instance, of 'Sunday neurosis,' that kind of depression which afflicts people who become aware of the lack of content in their lives when the rush of the busy week is over and the void within themselves becomes manifest. Not a few cases of suicide can be traced back to this existential vacuum. Such widespread phenomena as alcoholism and juvenile delinquency would not be understandable unless we recognise the existential vacuum underlying them. This is also true of the crises of pensioners and aging people.

Moreover, there are various masks and guises under which the existential vacuum appears. Sometimes the frustrated will to meaning is vicariously compensated for by a will to power, including the most primitive form of the will to power, the will to money. In other cases, the place of frustrated will to meaning is taken by the will to pleasure. That is why existential frustration often eventuates in sexual compensation. We can observe in such cases, that the sexual libido becomes rampant in the existential vacuum.²⁵

Frankl goes on to explicate in his book an important way in which meaning is discovered: "by experiencing someone, i.e., by love."²⁶ The inter-personal inner structure of the human self can only find fulfillment in ultimate love, the spiritual virtue that is the essence all morality. Faith and fidelity are deeply interwoven into the fabric of pure love. Love defines the will to live or die for the

²⁵ Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Trs. Ilse Lasch, Mumbai: Better Yourself Books, 2003), p.98

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.101

object of love. Love is what exists at the core of the Triune Godhead who through eternity are united in the inter-personal relationship of love. God is love, and man is made in God's image. Therefore, unless the love of God is at the central structure of the heart all consistency of the faith-life is lost.

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.¹

That is the reason why, Jesus commanded "If you love me, keep my commandments" (Jn.14:15), and John announces that "this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1Jn.5:3). The life of the believer must be the mirror of his faith. But, why? The obligation is constrained by the love of Christ (2Cor.5:14). It is not just the faith of the martyr, but also his love for his God that distinguishes him as a true witness of his faith. One cannot hold on to the integrity of faith between the core and the circumference without this spiritual affection (cf. Jude 1:20-21). While love among contingent beings may provide a meaning for life in this world, it is only love for God that can produce the passion and love for righteous life; for the love of God flows out to love for all humanity and is the spring of true benevolence. That may be one sense in which Einstein's statement on life's meaning may be understood: "What is the meaning of human life... To know an answer to this question means to be religious."²

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¹ Jude 1:20-21

² Albert Einstein, *Mein Weltbild*, Amsterdam: Querido Verlag, 1934, *Ideas and Opinions* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 1979), p.11

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Faith Fills the Void Inside

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There are a large number of terminologies distinctive to Christian preaching and teaching. Historically speaking, often, some terms were treated with admiration for their place only in the customary religion of that culture. For instance, the word "charismatic" was only used for a spiritual gift imparted to a Christian by the Spirit of God. However, now it is used for any popular leader of people movements, whether good or evil. The 1915 Funk and Wagnall's *Desk Standard Dictionary* provided a conspicuously Christian sense to the first meaning of faith, "A firm conviction of truth of what is declared by another, simply on the ground of his truth or faithfulness...belief and trust exercised toward God and Christ." By 1947 *The American College Dictionary* listed a considerably weakened Christian definition. Nowadays, the confidence of General Motors in the integrity of their product or of their customers is commonly related as faith. Among Christians,